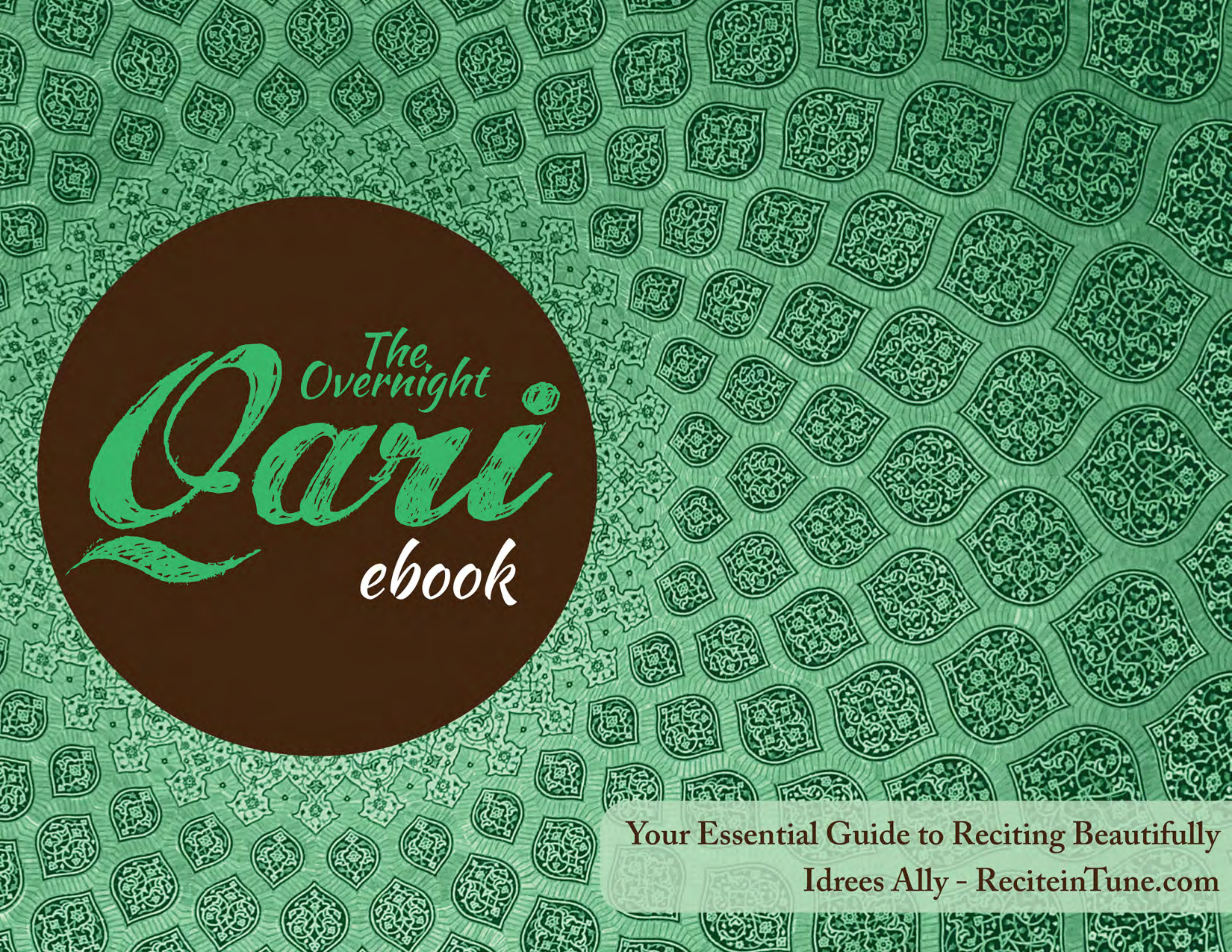

The Overnight
Qari
ebook
Your Essential Guide to Reciting Beautifully
Idrees Ally - ReciteinTune.com

About ReciteinTune.com

Imagine that we had a greater number of reciters in the West who could just blow you away with their beautiful recitation. What if **you** were one of them?

At ReciteinTune.com, we take to heart the Prophet's (sallallahu alayhi wa sallam) command to beautify our recitation, and we believe that the power and majesty of the recited Quran is an amazing miracle that Allah has given to our Ummah. Unfortunately, for the most part, our tradition of Quranic recitation has been lost in the West. Whereas we have many shuyookh and du'at, we have very few top-notch Qurra who can touch our hearts with their beautiful recitation.

We intend to revitalize this tradition by training and developing Qurra in the arts of recitation. Alhamdulillah there are now many teachers and programs spreading knowledge of correct recitation (tajweed) here in the West. So we've chosen to focus our efforts on helping students take their recitation to the next level, by offering voice and tune training for Quranic recitation, so that they can effectively deliver Allah's message to our hearts. Simply put, we help you learn how to recite beautifully.

Idrees Ally from Toronto, Canada, is the founder of **ReciteinTune.com**, and is a reciter and teacher of the Quran who is passionate about the art of recitation. He has been studying tajweed both formally and informally for several years and by the grace of Allah, has benefited from some of the experts in this field, including Shaykh Talal Ahdab from Toronto, Shaykh Abdullah Siraj from Egypt, Shaykh Uthman Khan from Toronto, and Shaykh Mohamed Umer Esmail from Texas. He also has training in the study of the ten qiraa'aat. He holds an Ijazah in the Riwaayah of Hafs 'an Aasim from Shaykh Mohamed Umer Esmail.

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Introduction

This is the story of a pious young man who, after many years of persisting in dua, saw a stunning dream where an angel came to him and taught him the Seven Principles of Beautiful Recitation. At first when he awoke, he passed it off as just another strange dream, until he sat down to recite the Quran, and realized that just overnight...

Yeah, right. Who are we kidding here? We both know there's no short list of tips, no Seven Principles, or no blue pill that will magically transform your voice overnight. So if that's what you're looking for, allow me to save you some time by telling you to go look elsewhere. However, if you're willing to put in some time and effort, **there are many things you can learn that will help you beautify your voice and take your recitation to new heights.**

In this book, I will break down the art of beautiful recitation of the Quran and help you get started on your own journey towards a beautiful recitation.

You will learn:

- **Tajweed tips** to help bring greater clarity to your recitation
- The basics of the **tune patterns** used in Quranic recitation
- How to warm up and **exercise your voice** to keep it ready for recitation
- How to improve the sound and quality of your voice
- How to **breathe properly** and hold your breath for those really long ayahs
- What reciting beautifully can do for your eman

SECTION 1 – You are a Qari

- Why recite in tune?
- “Just practice, you know?”
- Reciting is not singing
- Three tips to get more out of your recitation



SECTION 1 – You are a Qari

Perhaps it scares you a bit to think of yourself as a Qari. But let's face it, even if you're not a world-renowned reciter, you do love to recite the Quran, and chances are, someone's listening. Perhaps you're a mother or father who recites for your children as they drift off to sleep, or a brother or sister who leads your family or friends in salah. Or perhaps you are someone whom Allah as chosen to recite in a public forum. And even if you thought for a moment that no one was listening, you're forgetting something big – **Allah listens – and who better to recite beautifully for than Him?**

You are a Qari. Start reciting like one.

Why Recite in Tune?

The practice of reciting the Quran beautifully is something that comes directly from our Prophet (sallallahu alaihi wa sallam), who said: "Beautify the Quran with your voices" and "He is not from us who does not chant the Quran with melody."

Our ultimate objective in reciting beautifully, then, is to follow this command to the best of our abilities and earn the good pleasure of our Lord, the Most High. In addition to this lofty goal, there are a number of benefits associated with reciting beautifully:

- **Reciting beautifully increases and strengthens your own emotional connection to the Quran.** Our hearts respond to and are moved easily by beautiful recitations. Imam al-Ghazali (rahmatullahi ta'ala alayhi) described this phenomenon, noting



that just as the heart can affect the tongue, so too can the tongue affect the heart. As a reciter brings the ayat of Allah to life through his or her voice, this helps in delivering the ayat of Allah directly to the reciter's own heart as well as the hearts of others.

- **By beautifying your recitation, you can help bring others closer to the Quran.** On one occasion, our beloved Messenger (SAW) asked Ibn Mas'ud (radiyallahu 'anh), who was a beautiful reciter, to recite for him, telling him "I would love to hear it (the Quran) from someone other than myself." After listening to Ibn Mas'ud recite for some time, our beloved Messenger was overcome with tears. Some people have even told me that they became practicing Muslims upon hearing the beautiful and powerful recitations of reciters like Shaykh Abdul Basit.

- **By beautifying your recitation, you also gain a greater appreciation for the beauty of the Quran.** Allah has created us with a fitra (natural disposition) that appreciates beauty, and a beautiful recitation is something that can be appreciated by all, Muslims and non-Muslims alike. As you make an effort to recite beautifully you will begin to enjoy reading the Quran more and more. As well, the enjoyment you gain from listening to a beautiful recitation will increase in manifold ways. Our beloved Messenger (SAW) once overheard the beautiful, melodious recitation of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari (radiyallahu 'anh) and stayed to listen to and enjoy his recitation. Afterwards, he praised his voice, telling him "You have been given a flute from the flutes of Dawud."



By learning to recite beautifully, you too can, by the permission of Allah, fulfill these objectives. Are you ready to begin?

"Just practice, you know?"

Even if you're excited about reciting beautifully, you might still think "But I'm not good enough" or "I just can't do it!" Then, you might even proceed to justify that to yourself, jokingly saying something like "I'm a bit tone deaf." Or, without even realizing it, you may end up blaming Allah: "Allah didn't give me a good voice."

The truth is that unless you have some sort of medical issue, very few people are truly tone deaf – maybe less than two percent of people. For the most part, people may simply have not trained or developed their ears or their voices. In reality, **reciting beautifully is like any skill that can be developed with regular practice.** After all, don't you have the same vocal anatomy that Allah gave to the best of reciters?

Perhaps you won't be an overnight sensation, but with time, you can shape your voice to bring out its best. Qari Ismet Akcin, a Turkish Qari who studied at the University of al-Azhar, said it best: *"I believe everybody has a beautiful voice ... just practice, you know?"* And yes, that includes you!

Reciting is not singing

Now that you're pumped and ready to start reciting beautifully, let's get down to what you really need to know. But first things first – and you probably know this but it's worth



mentioning anyway – recitation of the Quran isn't something that just involves the voice. In other words, it's not just singing.

The Quran, in its divine glory and its inimitable majesty, is worlds apart from anything composed by even the best of poets and songwriters, and its purpose isn't for entertainment. It follows then that the recitation of the noble Quran isn't just like singing any song. And having a good voice alone won't cut it. Your whole being has to be involved if you want to deliver an amazing recitation that is pleasing to Allah subhanahu wa ta'ala. Mind. Body. Soul. They all have to be in sync.

There are many things you can do to improve your voice and your recitation. But the first thing to do is to give thanks to Allah for the voice that He has already blessed you with. Often we take our voices for granted and forget to give thanks to Allah – yet He tells us that this is the surest way to a greater share of His blessings: *"And remember when your Lord proclaimed: 'If you give thanks, I will surely give you more.'"* (Surah Ibrahim, ayah 7) On the next page, I give you a few more tips that you can start implementing right away.





Three tips to get more out of your recitation

Understand what you recite.

Read the translation of the section you intend to recite before you read the verses in Arabic. When you understand the meaning, you will benefit more from your recitation.

Feel what you recite.

Try to feel the emotions connected to the verses you are reading. The Quran describes the true believers as those whose faith rises when they hear the verses of Allah. After reading the translation, take a moment to ponder upon the meanings and ask yourself what emotions should I be feeling after reading these verses. This will help you to have a deeper emotional connection with the Quran.

Beautify what you recite.

Now try to express the meanings and emotions in your voice as you read the Quran in Arabic. This will further reinforce the meanings and emotions in your heart.

SECTION 2 – Essential Concepts Relating to Voice & Recitation

- There's the science, then there's the art
- Tajweed tips
- Maqamat – tunes for the soul
- Should I learn the maqamat?
- Talking about sound – pitch, tune, rhythm
- Tune vs. tone
- Beautify your recitation, but…



SECTION 2 – Essential Concepts Relating to Voice & Recitation

There's the science, and then there's the art.

Think of a beautiful house, one you would absolutely love to live in. For that house to make a great home, there are two things that have to be in order.

Firstly, there's the engineering side of things; the foundation has to be strong, the materials have to be of excellent quality, and it's all got to be put together properly. Otherwise, bad wiring could cause fires and poor plumbing could cause leaks, ruining the home. Secondly, there's the aesthetic side of things. The same materials could be used to build a jail, but the way it's all put together determines the appeal of the final structure. Perhaps a high ceiling in the living room, or a cozy den with a stone fireplace could change the whole feel. Add in some nice furniture and decor, and you have yourself not just a house, but a home that looks and feels great.

There's a similar thing going on with recitation. **There are two main areas to consider for a beautiful recitation: there's the science, and then there's the art.**

The science is the study of tajweed, which is concerned with having a correct and proper recitation. **Tajweed is the basis and foundation of recitation,** and deals with areas such as phonetics (e.g. the sounds and characteristics of letters), accents (e.g. proper pronunciation of vowel sounds), and rhythm (e.g. length of madd, ghunnah, and so on).



The other aspect of recitation, **the art of recitation, involves going beyond tajweed to deal with issues related to beautifying one's voice.** This includes things such as tune patterns used in recitation (known as the maqamat), voice control, breath control, and so on.

The idea is that just like the beautiful house we mentioned, **once the foundations of tajweed are there, you can go further to beautify and decorate your recitation, just as the Prophet (SAW) commanded us.** If you're looking to improve your recitation but haven't studied any tajweed at all, then that would be the right place to start. But if you've learnt some tajweed in the past or are doing so now, you can also work on beautifying the sound of your recitation as you work on your tajweed. For the most part, the rest of this book will focus specifically on this art of beautifying the voice in recitation.

Tajweed tips

Sometimes people who want to improve their reciting voice focus a lot on what I referred to as the art of recitation, focusing on their tune, holding their breath, and so on, but forget to pay attention to reciting with proper tajweed. Even though tajweed isn't the main focus of this book, it's worth mentioning that it is pretty important if you wish to recite the Quran correctly. Imagine if you thought you were reciting beautifully but in reality you were actually reciting incorrectly?

In light of this, I share with you three tajweed tips which should help you improve the clarity of your recitation. Watch the video below, entitled **Clear Vowels:**





Why is tajweed important?

Imam Al-Hafidh Muhammad ibnul Jazaree rahimahullah (d. 1429 CE) is one of the highest authorities in the field of tajweed and qira'at. In his text known as "Matn ul-Jazariyyah," he states: *"Because the Quran was revealed to us by Allah in this form, and like this (i.e. with tajweed) it has reached us. And it is also a beautification of tilawah, and an adornment of pronunciation and qira'ah."* (Matn ul-Jazariyyah, lines 28-29)



Interested in learning tajweed?

Beautiful Tajweed is our online tajweed program that will help you recite the Quran as it was meant to be recited, and feel the confidence that comes with reciting correctly and beautifully.

Although tajweed can get confusing, we simplify the science of tajweed for you so that you can focus on practice and implementation, so that you can get to see a clear, beautiful difference in your recitation.

Beautiful Tajweed course coming May 2014. Register your interest at http://www.BeautifulTajweed.com

Other resources to help you learn tajweed:

- Jaamiah Jazriyyah
- AboutTajweed.com
- The Children's Bequest



Maqamat – tunes for the soul

Now, we switch gears and focus more on the art of recitation. **The biggest area of study when it comes to the art of recitation is the study of tune or melody patterns, known as the maqamat.** The study of maqamat is the study of *"at-taghanni bi'l-Quran"*, or the art of beautifying the voice in recitation of the Quran.

So what exactly are the maqamat? To help make sense of the concept, listen to this clip of Shaykh Sudais reciting surah al-Fatiha. Pay attention to his tune. Now, listen to this clip where he recites surah ar-Rahman. Again, pay attention to his tune. Notice how, even though he's reciting different ayat, in both cases he does so with the same tune? Now, listen to this clip where Shaykh Sa'ad Nomani imitates Shaykh. Sudais. Even though he's a different reciter, he recites with exactly the same tune as Shaykh Sudais. In the study of maqamat, this tune pattern is known as maqam rast.

Now, compare Shaykh Sudais' tune with the way Shaykh Abdullah Basfar recites. Here, Shaykh Basfar recites surah al-Fatiha, and here he recites surah al-Mulk. Notice how Shaykh Basfar has his own characteristic tune which is different from Shaykh Sudais' tune? Shaykh Basfar's tune, in the study of maqamat, is known as maqam bayati. **With each tune, there's a specific or characteristic progression of pitches,** meaning that the reciter's voice moves up and down in a certain, predicable way. (If you don't understand what I mean, don't worry about it; we'll talk more about the theoretical stuff in a later section.)



While there are many, many different tunes that all of our favourite Qurra recite in, **these different tunes can be categorized into one of several basic tune patterns** – these are what the maqamat are. Scholars of this art of maqamat have distilled everything down into seven basic tunes, known as maqam bayati, maqam hijaz, maqam ‘ajam, maqam saba, maqam sika, maqam nahawand, and maqam rast.

Some of the maqamat also tend to evoke certain moods or emotions – for example maqam saba typically sounds “sad”, whereas maqams ‘ajam and sika typically sound more “upbeat.” Although this isn’t an exact science, knowing the maqamat and having flexibility in one’s voice can help in bringing out more emotion in one’s recitation and delivering the message of the Quran directly to the hearts of both the reciter and the listener.

To get a better idea of what the maqamat are, practically speaking, watch the following videos, where I recite the same few ayat in a few different maqamat. You’ll notice that whereas the ayat and the tajweed are the same, the tune differs. Going back to our previous analogy with the house, we can say that all the materials and structures are the same, but the design and decor is different.







Demonstrations of the different maqamat (tunes) used in recitation



Surah Fatihah
7 maqams



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Bayati



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Hijaz



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Nahawand



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Rast



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Sika



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Saba



Surah ale-Imran
Maqam Ajam

Want more examples? Check out our maqamat playlists at our YouTube Channel



Should I learn the maqamat?

If you've studied some tajweed and are looking to further improve the beauty of your recitation, **it is highly recommended that at the very least, you have a basic familiarity with the maqamat**.

Consider this analogy: If a child grows up in an English-speaking home, they'll naturally pick up English by assimilation and for the most part they would speak properly, especially if their parents speak very well or if the child reads a lot of books when they're young. However, someone who grows up in a Chinese-speaking home would need to study English later on, and might have to learn a lot more theoretical stuff like grammar rules. Interestingly, if the native English speaker wanted to increase their command of the English language, they might take advanced English classes in high school or University, including classes where theory is taught. The theory adds to what they already knew growing up, and increases their grasp of the language and their ability to communicate at a higher level.

Murattal & Mujawwad:

Two unique styles of recitation





The same goes for learning the ‘language’ of sound in the context of Quranic recitation. The “non-native speaker” is someone who may not have grown up listening to many good reciters, or for whatever reason didn’t develop a beautiful voice over time, even if they studied a lot of tajweed. In this case, in order to learn the ‘language’ of the sound of Quranic recitation, it would help a lot to be familiar with at least a few of the maqam patterns so that they can try to follow or mimic a certain tune.

The “native speaker” is like someone who may recite well because they grew up listening to many good reciters, and learned by assimilating or copying from them. In this case the person may have a pleasant voice and may not care to learn any more theory. If you fall into this category, learning some basic maqam patterns will still benefit you and help you take your recitation to the next level. **Not only will you have better control of your voice, but you will also be able to better convey the emotions of the ayah you are reciting.** InshaAllah, your heart and those of your listeners will be able to connect with the Quran at a deeper level.

Natural talent is just a starting point – it is voice and tune training that will take you further.



Remember, reciting with a beautiful tune does not mean that you should have to compromise on proper tajweed. You should always pay attention to the subtleties of tajweed and ensure that your recitation is correct, above all. This is something our best reciters have taught us.

Shaykh Abdul Basit Abdus Samad once said about his recitation: *"I am free as regards the melody, but I am tied to the rules of tajweed."*

Shaykh al-Husari has also said: *"The melody must not take the reciting out of the rules."*



Like what you've been reading so far? Please share:







Talking about sound – pitch, tune, rhythm

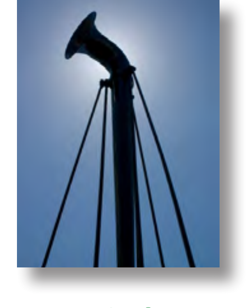
There are several **terms used to describe different attributes of sound – rhythm, melody, tone, tune, pitch, and so on.** It's important that you're comfortable with these concepts so that you can understand the science of sound as it relates to the art of recitation. Allow me to explain.

- **Pitch: Pitch has to do with the frequency of a sound wave.** I'll give you some examples instead of boring you with a science lesson. A bullhorn or foghorn that sounds from a large ship pulling in to dock is an example of a low-pitched sound, whereas that annoying noise your smoke detector makes when you burn your toast is an example of a high-pitched sound. Men, with deeper voices, tend generally to have lower-pitched voices than women. Amongst the famous Qaris, we can say for example that Shaykh Sudais has overall a higher-pitched voice than Shaykh al-Husary, may Allah have mercy on them both.

  Click on the images below for examples of sounds with different pitches.



Low pitch – ship horn



Low pitch – fog horn



High pitch – smoke detector



High pitch – alarm



- **Tune:** We spoke previously about the maqamat and mentioned that they're tune patterns, but we didn't really explain what is meant by 'tune' so let's do so here. Now that you know what pitch is, consider this: in the same breath/sentence, a person can vary their pitch quite considerably, sometimes going higher, sometimes going lower. Think back to our previous discussion of Shaykh Sudais' tune – if you pay attention to Shaykh Sudais' recitation, you'll notice that he varies his pitch sometimes going up in pitch, and sometimes going down. With any reciter you'll notice this – the beauty comes from varying the pitch. **If the pitch did not vary at all, then the whole recitation would be completely flat and monotonous.** You'll notice also (for example with Shaykh Sudais) that the pitch doesn't just go up and down in a random way, rather it varies in a somewhat clear and identifiable pattern. This is why you can recognize it as "Shaykh Sudais' tune".

  So we can think of the **pitch pattern as a whole – and this is what we would call the tune.** In the context of Quranic recitation, this is what the maqamat are – tune patterns – an identifiable pattern of pitches progressing from one to another. Sometimes, you might hear the word "melody" being used in connection to the maqamat – this is the same thing as a tune. With the maqamat, the patterns are loosely defined and not fixed, and there is a lot of improvisation in recitation, but nonetheless they are still recognizable enough to be categorized as one maqam or another.

- **Rhythm:** People sometimes mistakenly use this word to refer to a reciter's tune or melody. Rhythm has nothing to do with tune, but rather refers to the time-



component of sound, which is the domain of tajweed in terms of Quranic recitation. For example, if you said "Muuuuuhammad" instead of "Muhammad," you would be changing the rhythm by incorrectly stretching the "u" sound and making the word longer. This is why tajweed defines the rhythm of the Quran – when learning tajweed, you might learn the different lengths for the various types of madd (e.g. madd asli is 2 counts, while madd laazim is 6 counts), or you might learn for example how long to "hold" on a letter with sukoon depending on the characteristics of the letter (e.g. if the letter has shiddah, rikhwah, or tawassut). **Because tajweed determines the rhythm and is part of the Qur'an, one cannot apply an external rhythm to their recitation.** This would make the recitation incorrect.

Tune vs. Tone

Here's another thing that people often confuse. As we mentioned, when speaking about tune, we're speaking about a pattern of pitches.

Vocal tone, on the other hand, is something entirely different. It refers to one's vocal "quality," and is described much more subjectively. Ever go to an upscale coffee shop where the different coffees are described with words like fruity, bold, mellow, winey, nutty, bright, and so on? The coffee isn't actually fruit-flavoured, and certainly doesn't have alcohol in it – they're just using subjective terms to try to describe the small, but unique differences in flavour. In the same way, someone's voice can be described by terms such as bright, full, strong, hoarse, raspy, and so on. Shaykh Abdul Basit

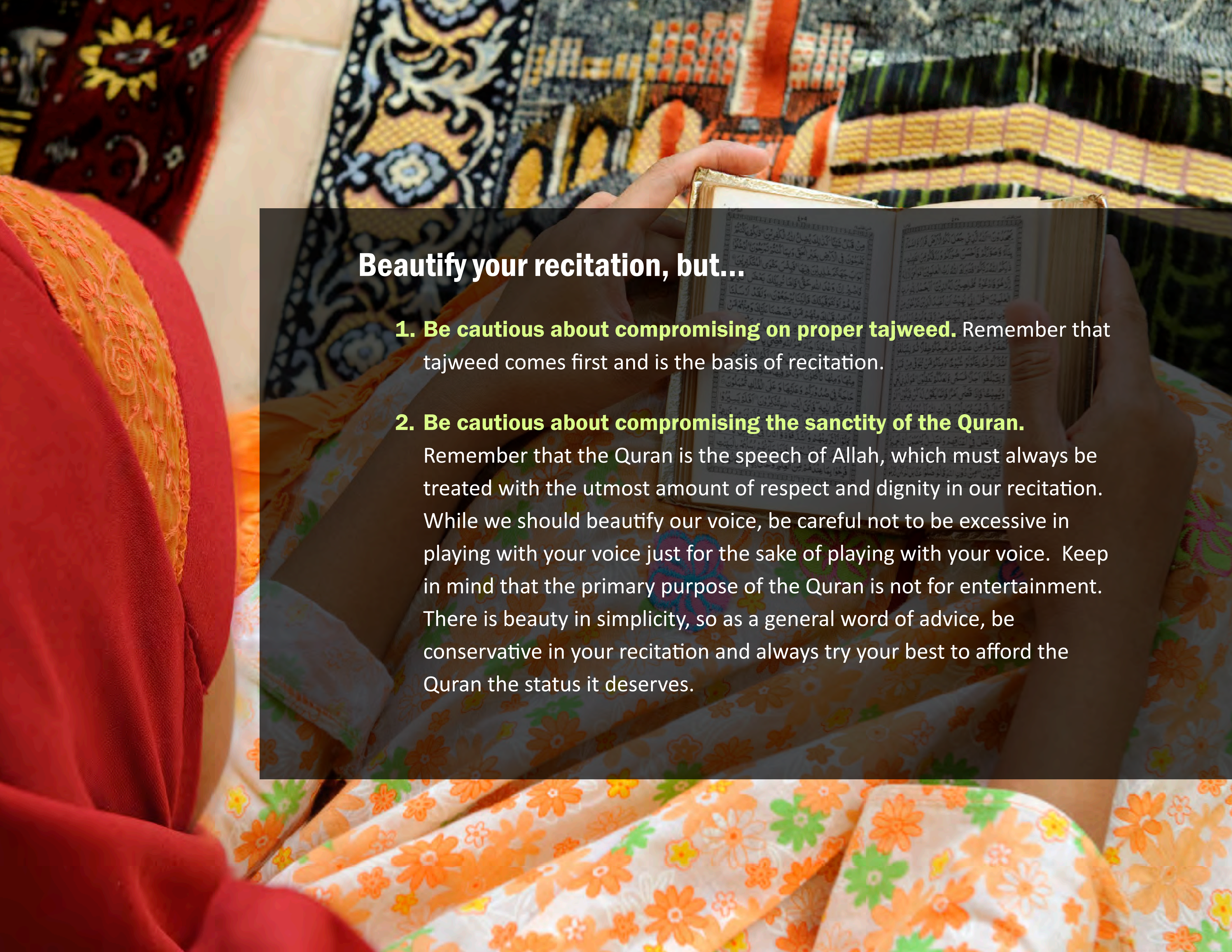


Abdus Samad, for example, is known for his high, clear voice, while a Qari like Shaykh Muhammad Tablawi is known for his powerful yet throaty voice.

Why does this matter? It's important to know first of all that **these are two different areas to work on – improving your tone and improving your tune.** Secondly, it helps to know that much of your tone can't really be altered, since it's determined by your vocal anatomy. This means that some part of your tone you should just accept as being natural and unique to you, and focus instead on working on your tune. While it is possible for people with vastly different vocal tones to recite beautifully, someone whose recitation is way out of tune would not sound pleasing to the ear.

Reciting with a beautiful tune, as our Prophet (SAW) instructed us to do, does not mean going to extremes! Our scholars were especially cautious about going overboard in recitation, and so should you. I mention on the next page two things to be especially wary about.





Beautify your recitation, but...

1. **Be cautious about compromising on proper tajweed.** Remember that tajweed comes first and is the basis of recitation.

2. **Be cautious about compromising the sanctity of the Quran.** Remember that the Quran is the speech of Allah, which must always be treated with the utmost amount of respect and dignity in our recitation. While we should beautify our voice, be careful not to be excessive in playing with your voice just for the sake of playing with your voice. Keep in mind that the primary purpose of the Quran is not for entertainment. There is beauty in simplicity, so as a general word of advice, be conservative in your recitation and always try your best to afford the Quran the status it deserves.

SECTION 3 – Tips & Techniques to Recite Beautifully

- Breath control
- What should I eat and drink?
- Proper articulation and voice projection
- Eliminating vocal tension, nasality, and breathiness
- Warming up
- Training your ear
- Practice tips

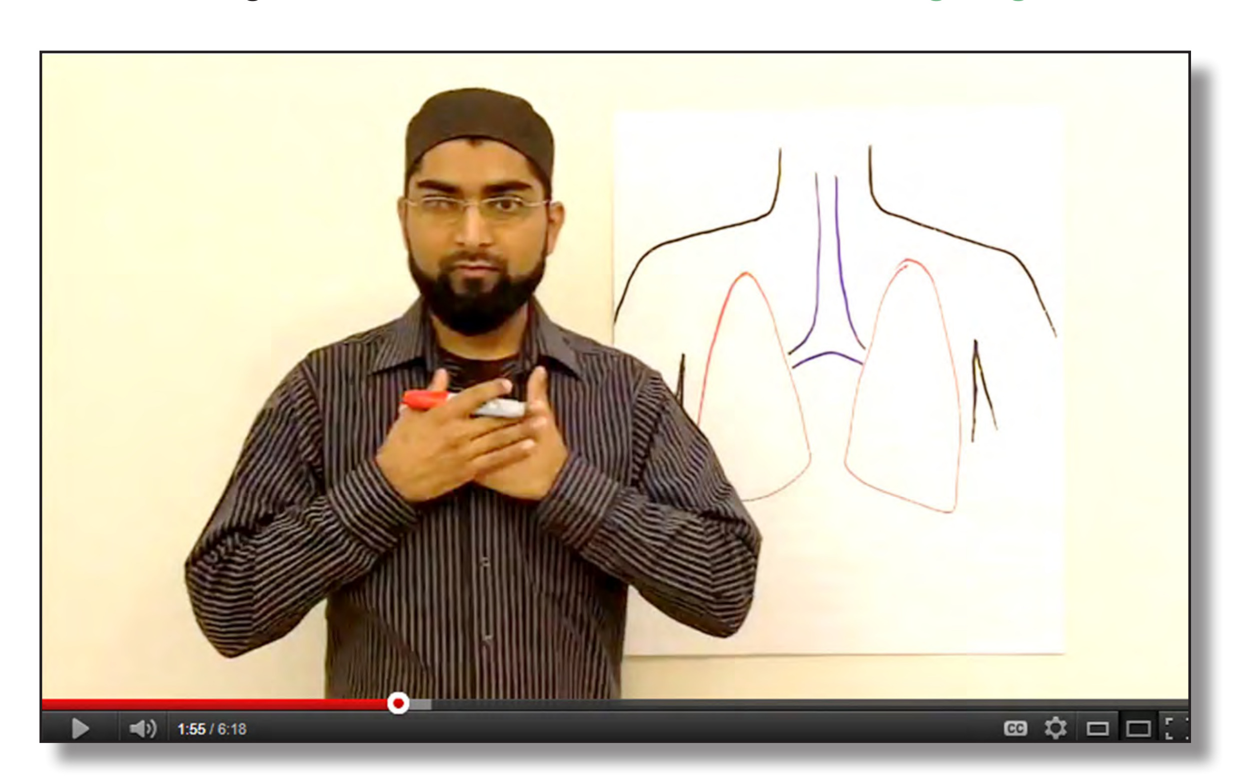


SECTION 3 – Tips & Techniques to Recite Beautifully

Breath Control

I'm sure you've watched videos of Qurra like Shaykh Abdul Basit, Shaykh al-Minshawi, and so on, where their breath never seems to run out, and thought to yourself, "Wow! I wish I could do that." In fact, breath control is one the things that I'm most frequently asked about. In this section, I'll give you a secret to breathing properly for those super-long ayahs.

Let's kick things off with this video, which I've called **Iceberg Lungs:**





It's amazing how much further you can go when you learn to implement this technique and breathe with your "stomach" rather than with your "chest".

To help you get a better feel for implementing this correctly, **here are two exercises you can try:**

1. Lie down on your back on a flat surface like the floor. Don't lie on something soft like a bed or sofa. Now take a deep breath. Notice that naturally, without any effort, your stomach and abdominal area moves upward, while your shoulders stay in place. Now, take a deep breath once again but this time, fill up with a lot of air, pushing your stomach outwards – if you're doing this correctly, you'll also feel your back and side muscles expand in all directions.

2. Sit upright in a chair, so that your lower back is properly rested against the back of the chair. Take in a nice, deep breath, without letting your shoulders rise upwards. If you're doing this correctly, your abdominal area will push outwards and you'll feel your lower back pressing into the chair.

With both of these exercises, you should start to get a feel for what it really means to fill up your entire abdominal cavity with air. Instead of taking shallow breaths with your upper chest area, **you really want to focus on filling your entire lower abdomen with air.** Of course, these exercises are a tad bit extreme – while reciting obviously you shouldn't need to fill yourself up with air to the point where you're almost bursting.



If you can focus on learning this and get to know how it feels to breathe in a full breath, you'll notice that your capacity for breathing will be greatly improved. This is way more important than trying to "hold" in your breath while reciting, or trying carefully to control the release of air. For the most part, doing these things can just result in tension in your body, and this tension will show up in your voice.

Once you have mastered this, there are other exercises that you can do to help have greater lung capacity and greater control over your release of air. In the following video, we cover a few of these exercises. Remember though that holding your breath for long is not a goal of recitation in and of itself. The rules of stopping (waqf) must always take precedence.





What should I eat and drink?

People often ask what types of food and drink they should have to boost their reciting voice, and what kinds to avoid. The answer to this really depends on your personal reciting goals – while someone reciting publicly might monitor their nutrition or skip a meal before reciting, someone else might not feel the need to make this a big deal. There are of course some general guidelines that can help everyone, so in this section, I'll help break that down for you.

Your best strategy is, generally speaking, to **eat and drink in moderation.** Our beloved Messenger (SAW) recommended filling our stomachs one third with food, one third with drink, and the last third with air, meaning to leave it empty. When reciting, eating in moderation and not stuffing oneself to the max is especially important. Find out why in the next video, entitled **Cage Match:**





Immediately prior to reciting, it is advisable to avoid eating. Your body will naturally slow down after a heavy meal, and as your body's resources are put towards digestion, you'll feel the tiredness in your voice. **Particular foods to avoid are dairy products and spicy foods,** which can cause extra mucous to build up at your vocal cords and interfere with their vibration. Then, when you end up forcefully clearing your throat, you can end up doing further damage by irritating your vocal cords.

When it comes to drink, there's really only **one simple rule: drink lots and lots of water.** Water helps to maintain proper lubrication for your vocal cords, so that they don't swell, redden, and get irritated due to friction. Your best bet is room temperature water – water that is too hot or ice cold can also mess up your vocal cords. Stay away from drinks such as Coke or coffee. These contain caffeine, which will cause you to lose water and leave your throat feeling dry. Some juices, orange juice for example, might contain sugars or acid which can lead to extra mucous or phlegm production.

To summarize, these are some basic guidelines to help you maintain the health of your vocal cords. There's no need to be extreme in the matter, so as a general rule, drink a lot of water and eat healthy foods in moderation.

Proper articulation and voice projection

To make it easier for others to clearly hear you, and to be able to effectively make out what you're reciting, you need to be doing two things: proper articulation, and proper voice projection.



Articulation normally falls under the domain of tajweed. If you've ever studied tajweed under a teacher, you'd be familiar with their attempts to get you to recite more clearly. Proper articulation really has to do with understanding the points of articulation for each of the Arabic letters (makharij ul-huroof), as well as their phonetic characteristics (sifaat).

When reciting, **you must make effort to recite clearly, without mumbling** the blessed words of the Quran or without slurring one word in to another. We might be lazy in our ordinary speech, but part of the respect we give to the Quran is that we take care to move our mouths and recite each and every letter with precision.

Reciting with clarity

Imam ibnul Jazaree rahimahullah states in his Matn ul-Jazariyyah regarding reciting with proper articulation:

> *"There exists nothing between (applying tajweed) and leaving it*
> *Except for a person to exercise (correctly) with their jaws."*



A separate (but related) issue is that of voice projection. If you recite publicly, or lead others in salah, then this section is especially important for you.

Voice projection has to do with increasing your volume by "throwing" or "casting" your voice, without needing to yell or scream. Generally, when people think of increasing volume, they think of yelling, shouting, or screaming, all of which sounds very unpleasant (especially when reciting Quran) and are also hard on your vocal cords. **Projecting your voice, on the other hand, has to do with casting your voice by focusing your breath.** Just as an LCD projector focuses light in order to project an image onto a screen, you need to focus your breath in order to project your voice.

Confused? I can appreciate that it's a bit of a difficult concept to describe, but check out the video below, entitled **Throw Your Voice** where I help you understand how to project your voice.





Eliminating vocal tension, nasality, and breathiness

In a previous section, we mentioned that vocal tone refers to vocal quality, and is something that is described qualitatively or subjectively. One point that we clarified was that there are some aspects of vocal tone that are unique to you – so there's no need to fret over changing them – **sometimes you simply need to embrace the beauty and uniqueness of your own voice.**

Having said that, there are some things you can do to beautify the quality of your voice, and there are a few common problems that can prevent reciters like yourself from achieving a quality tone. If you feel that the sound of your voice could be even a tad bit richer, fuller, and clearer, then please read on.

- **Sit back and relax.** Well, you don't actually have to sit while reciting, but you certainly do need to relax. Many beginner/amateur reciters make the mistake of reciting with too much tension in their face and neck. This tension extends inwards as well, affecting the area of the vocal apparatus, and prevents them from producing a nice, clean sound. It's important for you to realize that tightening your neck or getting your face twisted into strange contortions won't actually improve your tajweed or help you produce a more beautiful sound. Yes, you do need to make an effort to properly enunciate each letter and vowel sound, but it is not necessary to exaggerate. Just keep your face, neck, and vocal area natural and relaxed, and good things will follow.



Wondering if you're staying nice and relaxed when you recite? Find out in the video below, called **No Tension, Please:**



- **Eliminating Nasality.** Nasality is one of the most common tone problems that many people face when reciting. In the video below, I offer a simple test to check how nasal your voice is and what you can do to fix it. I call it the **Nose-pinch Test:**

Part 1



Part 2





- **Eliminating Breathiness.** Breathiness is slightly less common than nasality, but is important to eliminate for good vocal health and to conform to proper tajweed. I elaborate on this in the video below, entitled **Clean & Crisp:**



Warming up

Ever notice what elite runners do right before the starting gun is fired? They warm up, stretching and shaking off their muscles. Even before getting out on the track and after the race, any runner who knows what they're doing would also stretch in order to warm up and loosen their muscles, thereby reducing the chances of injury.

The same applies when we're dealing with our voice. **Our vocal cords, like the other muscles in our body, respond to conditioning.** I know from my own experience that if I haven't practised reciting in the mujawwad style for a while, when I get back to it my



voice is “cold” and I have some trouble reciting at a high pitch or fluctuating my voice. **Warming up is key to keeping your voice in great shape.** Here’s a video where our dear Qari Ismet shows us how we can do so



Another way to do this in a more structured way is to simply say something like “aaah” while going up in pitch. Once you reach a comfortable upper limit, you can repeat while coming down in pitch. There’s no need to strain in order to reach very high; for the purposes of warming up it’s best to stay in a comfortable range.





Training your ear

Ear training has little to do with your actual physical ear and much to do with developing your "mental ear." Essentially what this refers to is developing your ability to hear/perceive different aspects of sound. In the context of Quranic recitation, there are a few things you need to be able to "hear" in your head. **In the domain of tajweed, you need to be able to discriminate between different durations,** for example different lengths of ghunna or madd.

In the domain of tune/melody/maqamat, you need to be able to distinguish between different pitches (if one pitch higher or lower than another, for example). With a basic ability to distinguish between pitch levels, you can then learn to distinguish between melodies/tunes, and with training, you should also be able to distinguish between the different maqamat used in recitation.

So how do you get there? This is where your physical ear comes in. By consistently listening to many good, quality reciters, you will over time gain a deeper appreciation for subtle changes in pitch and melody. Granted, this does take patience and dedication, but the effort will pay off. This is how many Qurra can recite beautifully even without having any formal training in maqamat. Simply by growing up immersed in a culture of recitation, they were able to pick up and internalize the aesthetics of Quranic recitation.



Many times, beginners who would like to learn some of the maqamat look for a shortcut. They expect or think that if I were to write out or demonstrate the "exact pattern" for each maqam, they would immediately be able to copy it. However, this simply isn't the case. Find out why in the video below, entitled **Thrown in the Deep End:**



Don't keep these to yourself. These tips are meant to be shared. Click here:







Practice tips

Of course, the best practice for your voice is to frequently recite the Book of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'ala). Remember our analogy with the elite runner? Winning athletes always make mention of the amount of hard work and practice that they put in. The same thing applies here: regularly reciting the Quran will do wonders for your voice, and of course the benefits will also extend to your inner spiritual state.

Here are a few tips regarding practice:

1. **Recite from the Quran every day,** even if it's a short portion. Consistency matters.
2. **Make extra time for practice** that is separate from your daily devotional recitation.
3. **Record yourself.** You sound different to yourself than you do to others. Listen carefully to your recordings, and take note of your strengths and weaknesses.
4. **Listen to recitations in both the murattal and mujawwad styles,** and practice likewise in both styles. Most people have a preference for one style over the other, so it's okay if you do, but by listening and practicing in both styles, you'll pick up on different voice techniques, different usages of maqam patterns, and you'll introduce more versatility into your own voice.

Another way to develop a more astute ear is to combine this “informal” listening with more structured listening exercises designed to help you better internalize a sense of pitch, melody, and so on.

We cover these exercises to help you build your voice and tune in our Overnight Qari course. Visit OvernightQari.com for more



SECTION 4 – Putting it all in perspective

The rights of the Quran

Recite your best



SECTION 4 – Putting it all in perspective

The rights of the Quran

We've spoken much about various elements of sound, such as pitch and melody/maqamat, and we've gone into detail on techniques regarding vocal tone, breath control, and so on. But as we near the end of this ebook, it is vitally important for us to reflect and remember where all of this fits in the larger scheme of things.

Qari Imran Khan has outlined **five rights that the Quran has over us.** These rights are that we:

1. **Believe** in the Quran
2. **Recite** the Quran
3. **Understand** the Quran
4. **Implement** the teachings of the Quran, and
5. **Teach** the Quran to others.

You can find his explanation of these rights here.

As you can see, reciting the Quran properly and beautifully is fulfilling just one of the many rights of the Quran over us. As Muslims we have to maintain things in balance and keep things in their proper perspective. Some Muslims are very passionate about recitation, which is great, but sometimes if the proper balance is not maintained, a person can become obsessed with beautiful voices and beautiful melodies, and forget



that we're dealing with the Quran and not just any man-made song. Remember: **when we recite, we are reciting Quran, not maqamat, and when we listen, we are listening to the Quran, not maqamat.**

Furthermore, as a student of Quranic recitation, you must ensure that recitation alone doesn't become your only interaction with the Quran. Take time to understand the Quran – you can read an explanation (tafseer), listen to a lecture, or attend a seminar or course to gain a deeper understanding of the Quran. At the very least, try to read a translation and ponder over the ayat that Allah has revealed as a guidance for us.

Lastly, we must remember that what we recite with our tongues must also be acted out by our limbs – we must always live our lives implementing the teachings and principles of the Quran. Keeping these advices in mind will make you a better Qari as well, InshaAllah.

Recite your best!

By now, you must have a lot to think about with everything we've covered in this ebook. We started with essential motivation, reminding you that **anyone, including yourself, can learn to recite beautifully.** We mentioned that while it's not something that you'll learn overnight, it is definitely something that you can develop through practice.

We discussed the difference between the science and the art when it comes to recitation, and then we went into the art in some more detail, learning about essential concepts such as the maqamat.

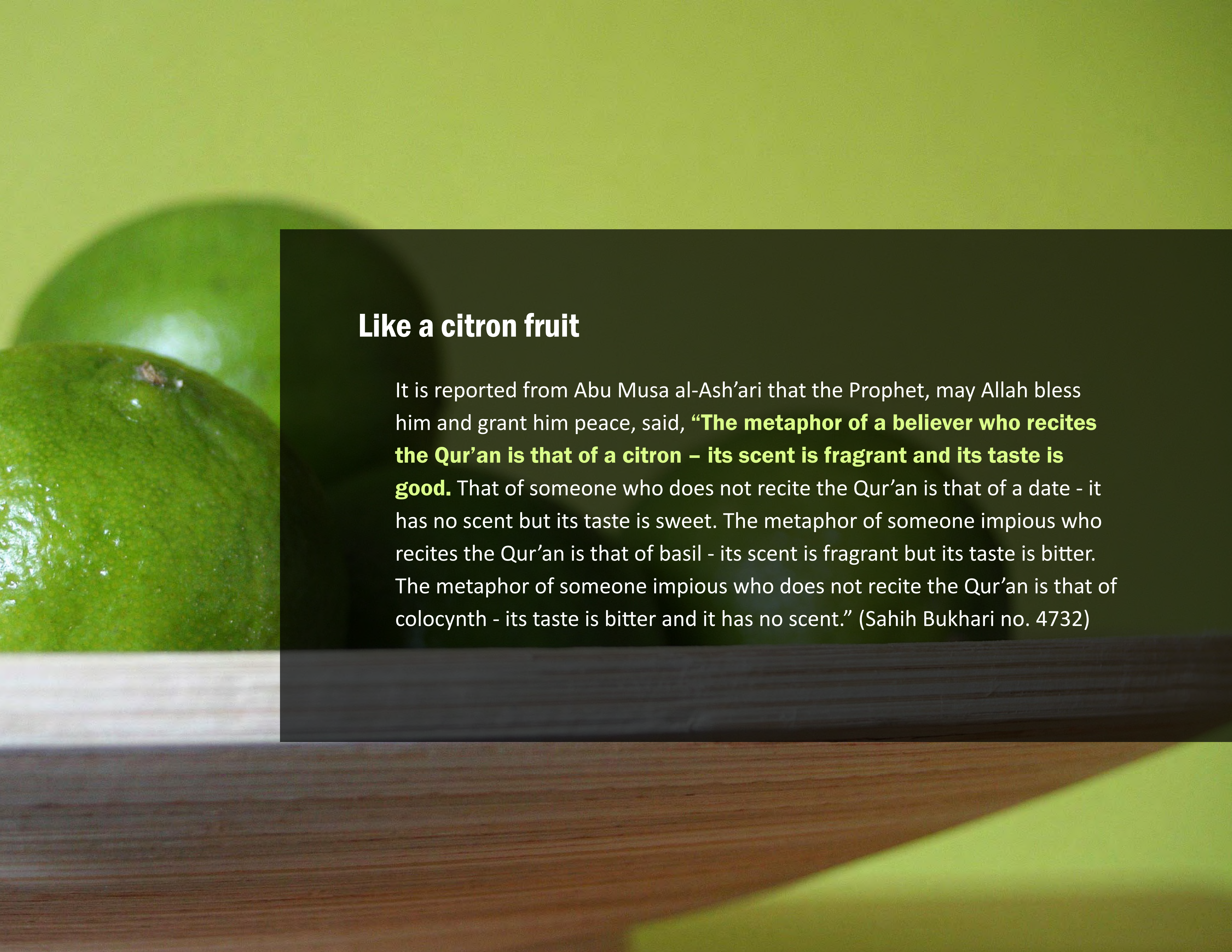


We continued with some tips to improve your breath control, your voice projection, and your vocal tone.

Lastly, we took a step back, thinking about the goals and objectives of reciting beautifully, and thinking about our relationship with the Quran as a whole.

My hope is that by now, you've understood the importance of reciting beautifully, and that you've fully realized that you too can recite beautifully. If you found along the way that you got a bit bogged down with all the info, **don't stress, just take things one step at a time.** Reciting the Quran beautifully is a very fulfilling act, so have fun and enjoy the ride. Keep listening, keep learning, and keep reciting.

Who knows ... will you be the next Overnight Qari?



Like a citron fruit

It is reported from Abu Musa al-Ash'ari that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, **"The metaphor of a believer who recites the Qur'an is that of a citron – its scent is fragrant and its taste is good.** That of someone who does not recite the Qur'an is that of a date - it has no scent but its taste is sweet. The metaphor of someone impious who recites the Qur'an is that of basil - its scent is fragrant but its taste is bitter. The metaphor of someone impious who does not recite the Qur'an is that of colocynth - its taste is bitter and it has no scent." (Sahih Bukhari no. 4732)



Thanks for reading!

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